

October 19, 2005 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**START DATE OF NOVEMBER 1 START SET
FOR NEBRASKA'S NATURAL GAS COLD WEATHER RULE**

LINCOLN – Financially strapped customers of Nebraska's privately owned natural gas utilities will have an additional 30 days to pay their bills for a five-month period starting November 1.

The Nebraska Public Service Commission's cold weather rule applies only to customers of the state's three privately owned natural gas companies – Aquila, Kinder Morgan, and Northwestern Energy. From November 1 through March 31, those companies may not shut off service to customers without allowing an additional 30 days to pay beyond the normal bill due date.

First District Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln said the cold weather rule is a tool for customers and the companies to work together in a period when natural gas bills are the highest. "Any customer finding it difficult to pay natural gas bills during the winter heating months should contact the company to make arrangements for payment. The cold weather rule is intended to provide an opportunity for customers to work out a payment plan with their natural gas supplier."

The commissioner noted that predictions are for higher than normal natural gas prices this winter which could put a financial burden on customers.

"There are several avenues that customers can explore to minimize the impact of higher natural gas prices," Landis said.

He recommended reducing thermostat settings when a home or building is unoccupied, checking gas appliances and space-heating equipment for efficient operation, obtaining a home energy audit to identify ways to conserve energy, and participation in a gas company's yearly budget plan to spread gas costs throughout the year.

"Customers can also check furnace filters regularly, as often as once a month to keep the air in the home cleaner; conserve water use because water in the home's pipes is colder during the winter and takes longer to heat; improve insulation; install storm windows and doors or attach clear plastic to the inside or outside of windows and screen doors; caulk around windows and door frames, and cover window air conditioners," Landis said.

"Another important avenue," Landis said, "is to check with the natural gas company or a local public assistance agency for help with natural gas costs. About three-fourths of Nebraska's residents also have 2-1-1 dialing for health and human services referrals, which also can direct callers to appropriate program administrators."

The Public Service Commission implemented the cold weather rule when it was given regulatory authority over the state's privately owned natural gas companies by the 2003 Legislature. Some Nebraska communities are served by municipally owned natural gas utilities that are not subject to regulation by the Commission.

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